

On Popular Education



Lev Tolstoy

On Public Education – by Lev Tolstoy

Public education has always and everywhere represented and represents an incomprehensible phenomenon. People want education, and every individual unconsciously seeks education. The more educated class of people - society, the government - strive to pass their knowledge and to educate the less educated class of people. It seems such a match of needs should satisfy both the educating and the educated classes. But the very opposite takes place. People continually counteract the efforts made for their education by society or by the government, as the representatives of a higher educated class, and for the most part these efforts remain unsuccessful.

Not to speak of the schools of antiquity - India, Egypt, ancient Greece, and even Rome - the arrangement of which is as little known to us as their public opinion of those institutions, this phenomenon seems startling to us in the European schools from the days of Luther to our own times.

Germany, the founder of the school, during a two hundred years struggle, still has not yet been able to overcome the counteraction of the masses to the school. Despite of the appointments of distinguished invalid soldiers as teachers made by the Fredericks; despite of the strictness of law which has been in force for two hundred years ; despite of the preparation of teachers according to the latest fashion in seminaries; despite of the Germans' sense of obedience to the law, compulsory education even to this moment lies as a heavy burden upon the people: the German governments cannot bring themselves to abolish the law of compulsory education. Germany can pride itself on the education of its people only by statistical data, but the people, as before, for the most part take away from school nothing but an aversion to it.

France, despite of the transfers of education from the hands of the king to those of the Directory, and from the hands of the Directory to those of the clergy, has succeeded in the matter of public education as little as Germany, and even less, so say the historians of education, judging from official records. Serious statesmen even now propose for France the introduction of compulsory education as the only means for overcoming the opposition of the

masses.

In free England, where the promulgation of such a law has been and always will be unthinkable,- which, however, many regret, - society, and not the government, has struggled and still struggles with all possible means and more vigorously than elsewhere against the people's expressed opposition to the schools. Schools are conducted there partly by the government and partly by private societies. The enormous dissemination and activity of these religio-philanthropic-educational societies in England better than anything else prove the power of resistance with which the educating part of society there meets.

Even the new country, the North American States, has not evaded that difficulty and has made education semi-compulsory.

It is, of course, even worse in our own country, where the masses are even more enraged against the idea of the school; where the most educated people dream of the introduction of the German law of compulsory education; and where all the schools, even those intended for the higher classes, exist only as bait for rank and for the advantages arising therefrom.

So far the children are everywhere sent to school by force, while parents are compelled to send their children to school by the severity of the law, or by cunning, or by provision of benefits; whereas people everywhere educate themselves and regard education as beneficial.

What is this? The need of education lies in every person; people love and seek education, as they love and seek the air for breathing; the government and society burn with the desire to educate the masses, and yet, notwithstanding all the force of cunning and the persistence of governments and societies, the masses constantly manifest their dissatisfaction with the education which is offered to them, and step by step submit only to force.

As at every conflict, so also here, it was necessary to solve the question: What is more lawful, the resistance, or the action itself? Must the resistance be broken, or the action be changed?

So far, as may be seen from history, the question has been solved in favor of the state and the educating society. The resistance has been acknowledged to be unlawful, men seeing in it the principle of evil inherent in man, and so, without receding from its mode of action, that is, without receding from that form and from those contents of education, which society already possessed, the state has made use of force and cunning in order to overpower the people's resistance. People until now slowly and reluctantly submitted to this action.

It must be supposed that the educating society had some reasons to know that the education, which it possessed in a certain form, was beneficial for a certain people at a certain historical epoch.

What were these reasons? What reasons has the school of our day to teach this, and not that, thus, and not otherwise?

Always and in all ages humanity has endeavored to give and has given more or less satisfactory answers to these questions, and in our time this answer is even more necessary than ever. A Chinese mandarin who never leaves Peking may be compelled to learn by rote the sayings of Confucius, and these saws may be beaten into children with sticks; it was possible to do that in the Middle Ages, - but where are we to get in our time that strong faith in the indubitableness of our knowledge, which would give us the right of forcibly educating the masses? Let us take any medieval school, before and after Luther; let us take all the learned literature of the Middle Ages, - what strength of faith and of firm, indubitable knowledge of what is true and what false, is to be seen in those people! It was easy for them to know that the Greek language was the only necessary condition of an education, because Aristotle was written in that language, the truth of whose propositions no one doubted for several centuries afterward. How could the monks not demand the study of Holy Writ which stood on a firm foundation? It was understandable that Luther demanded the mandatory study of Hebrew when he firmly knew that in that language God Himself had revealed the truth to men. Clearly, so long as the critical sense of humanity was still dormant, the school had to be dogmatic, and it was natural for students to learn by heart the truths which had been revealed by God and by Aristotle, and the poetical

beauties of Vergil and Cicero. No one could even imagine a truer truth or a more beautiful beauty for several centuries afterward.

But what is the position of the school in our day, which has stuck in the same dogmatic principles, when, side by side with the class where the scholar learns by heart the truth about the immortality of the soul, they try to make it clear to him that the nerves, which are common to man and to a frog, are that which anciently used to be called a soul; when, after the story of Joshua, the son of Nun, which is transmitted to him without explanations, he finds out that the sun had never turned around the earth; when, after the beauties of Vergil have been explained to him, he finds the beauties in Alexandre Dumas, sold to him for five centimes, much greater; when the only faith of the teacher consists in the conviction that there is no truth, that everything existing is sensible, that progress is good and backwardness bad; when nobody knows in what this universal faith in progress consists?

After all this, compare the dogmatic school of the Middle Ages, where truths were indubitable, with our school, where nobody knows what truth is, and to which the children are nevertheless forced to go and the parents to send their children. More than that. It was an easy matter for the medieval school to know what ought to be taught, what first, and what later, and how it was all to be taught, so long as there was but one method and so long as all science centered in the Bible, in the books of St. Augustine, and in Aristotle.

But how are we, in this endless variety of methods of instruction, proposed to us on all sides, in this immense mass of sciences and their subdivisions, which have been evolved in our time, - how are we to select one of the many proposed methods, one certain branch of the sciences, and, which is most difficult, how are we to select that sequence in the instruction of these sciences which would be sensible and fair? More than that. The discovery of these principles is the more difficult in our time, in comparison with the medieval school, for the reason that then education was confined to one definite class which prepared itself to live in certain well-defined conditions; while in our time, when the whole people has declared its right to be educated, it appears much more difficult and much more necessary for us to know what is needed for all these heterogeneous classes of people.

What are these principles? Ask any pedagogue you please why he teaches this and not that, and this first and not later. If he will understand you, he will say that he knows the God-revealed truth, and that he considers it his duty to transmit it to the younger generation and to educate it in those principles which are unquestionably true; but he will give you no answer in regard to the subjects which do not refer to religious education. Another pedagogue will explain to you the foundation of his school by the eternal laws of reason, as expounded by Fichte, Kant, and Hegel. A third will base his right of compulsion on the fact that the schools have always been compulsory and that, in spite of this, the result of these schools has been real education. Finally, a fourth, uniting all these principles, will tell you that the school has to be such as it is, because religion, philosophy, and experience have evolved it as such, and that that which is historical is sensible. All these proofs, including all other possible reasons, may be, it seems to me, divided into four classes: religious, philosophical, experimental, and historical.

Education which has for its basis religion, that is, divine revelation, the truth and legality of which nobody may doubt, must indisputably be inculcated on the people, and in this - only in this - case violence is legitimate. That is what missionaries in Africa and in China do up until now. This is being done up until now in the schools of the whole world in regards to religious instruction: Catholic, Protestant, Hebrew, Mohammedan, and so forth. But in our time, when religious education forms but a small part of education, the question what ground the school has to compel the young generation to receive religious instruction in a certain fashion remains unanswered from the religious point of view.

Maybe the answer will be found in philosophy. Has philosophy as firm a foundation as religion? What are these principles? By whom, how, and when have these principles been enunciated? We do not know them. All the philosophers search for the laws of good and evil; having discovered these laws, they, coming to pedagogy (they all couldn't not to touch upon pedagogy), compel the human race to be educated in conformity with these laws. But each of these theories, in a series of other theories, appears incomplete and makes only a new link in the perception of good and evil inherent in humanity.

Every thinker expresses only that which has been consciously perceived by his epoch, and therefore the education of the younger generation in terms of this consciousness is totally redundant: this consciousness is already inherent in the living generation.

All the pedagogic-philosophical theories have for their aim and problem the bringing up of virtuous people. However, the concept of virtue either remains the same or develops infinitely, and, despite all the theories, the decadence and bloom of virtue do not depend on education. A virtuous Chinaman, a virtuous Greek, Roman, or Frenchman of our time, are either equally virtuous, or equally remote from virtue.

The philosophical theories of pedagogy solve the question of how to bring up the best man according to a given theory of ethics, which has been evolved at one time or other, and which is accepted as indisputable. Plato does not doubt the truth of his own ethics, and on its basis he builds up his education, and on that education he constructs his state. Schleiermacher says that ethics is not 'yet an accomplished science, and therefore the upbringing and the education must have for their aim the preparation of people who should be able to enter upon such conditions as they find in life, and who should at the same time be able to work vigorously upon their future improvement. Education in general, says Schleiermacher, has for its aim the presentation of a member all prepared to the state, church, public life, and science. Only ethics alone, though it is not a finished science, gives us an answer to the question what kind of a member of these four elements of life an educated man should be.

Like Plato, so all the philosophical pedagogues look to ethics for the problem and aim of education, some regarding this ethics as well-known, and others regarding it as an eternally evolving consciousness of humanity; but not one theory gives a positive answer to the question of what and how to teach the masses. One says one thing, another - another, and the farther we proceed, the more their propositions become at variance. There arise at one and the same time various contradictory theories. The theological tendency struggles with the scholastic, the scholastic with the classical, the classical with the real, and at the present time all these directions exist, without contending with each other, and nobody knows what is true and what false. There arise thousands

of various, strangest theories, based on nothing, like those of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and so forth; there appear side by side all the existing schools: the real, the classical, and the theological establishments. Everybody is dissatisfied with what is, and nobody knows that something new is needed and possible.

If you follow out the course of the history of the philosophy of pedagogy, you will find in it, not a criterion of education, but, on the contrary, one common idea, which unconsciously lies at the foundation of all the pedagogues, in spite of their frequent divergence of opinion, - an idea which convinces us of the absence of that criterion. All of them, beginning with Plato and ending with Kant, tend to this one thing, to the liberation of the school from the historical fetters which weigh heavily upon it. They wish to guess what it is that man needs, and on these more or less correctly guessed needs they build up their new school. Luther wants people to study Holy Writ in the original, and not according to the commentaries of the holy fathers. Bacon enjoins the study of Nature from Nature, and not from the books of Aristotle. Rousseau wants to teach life from life itself, as he understands it, and not from previously instituted experiments. Every step forward taken by the philosophy of history consists only in freeing the school from the idea of instructing the younger generations in that which the elder generations considered to be science, in favor of the idea of instructing it in what are the needs of the younger generations. This one common and, at the same time, self-contradictory idea is felt in the whole history of pedagogy: it is common, because everybody demands a greater measure of freedom for the school; contradictory, because everybody prescribes laws based on his own theory, and by that very act that freedom is curtailed.

The experience of past and of existing schools? But how can this experience prove to us the justice of the existing method of compulsory education? We cannot know whether there is not another, more legitimate method, since the schools have heretofore not yet been free. It is true, we see at the highest rung of education (universities, public lectures) that education strives to become ever more free. But that is only a supposition. Maybe education at the lower steps must always remain compulsory, and maybe experience has proved to us that such schools are good? Let us look at these schools, without

consulting the statistical tables of education in Germany, but by trying to get to know the schools, and learn their influence on the masses in reality.

This is what reality has shown to me: A father sends his daughter or son to school against his wish, cursing the institution which deprives him of his son's labor, and counting the days up to the time when his son will become schulfrei [free from school exercise (German)] (this expression alone shows how the people look at the schools). The child goes to school with the conviction that the only power of which he knows, that of his father, does not approve of the power of the state, to which he submits upon entering school. The information which he receives from his older companions, who were in that institution before, is not calculated to enhance his desire to enter school. Schools present themselves to him as an institution for torturing children, - an institution in which they are deprived of their chief pleasure and youthful needs, of free motion; where Gehorsam (obedience) and Ruhe (quietude) are the chief conditions; where he needs a special permission to go out "for a minute;" where every misdeed is punished with a ruler (although in the official world corporal punishment with the ruler is declared abolished) or by the continuation of the cruel condition for the child - study.

School justly presents itself to the child's mind as an establishment where he is taught that which nobody understands; where he is generally compelled to speak not his native patois, Mundart [local language (French, German)], but a foreign language; where the teacher for the greater part sees in his students his natural enemies, who, out of their own malice and that of their parents, do not wish to learn that which he has learned; and where the students, on their side, look upon their teacher as their enemy, who only out of personal spite compels them to learn such difficult things. In such an institution they are obliged to spend six years and about six hours every day. What the results must be, we again see from what they really are, not according to the reports, but from actual facts.

In Germany nine-tenths of the school population take away from school a mechanical knowledge of reading and writing, and such a strong loathing for the paths of science traversed by them that they never again take a book into their hands.

Let those who do not agree with me show me the books that the people read; even the Badanian Hebel, and the almanacs, and the popular newspapers are read as rare exceptions. As an incontrovertible proof that the masses have no education serves the fact that there is no popular literature and, above all, that the tenth generation has to be sent to school with the same compulsion as the first.

Not only does such a school breed loathing for education, but in these six years it inculcates upon these students hypocrisy and deceit, arising from the unnatural position in which the students are placed, and that condition of incoherence and confusion of ideas, which is called the rudiments of education.

During my travels in France, Germany, and Switzerland I tried to discover the information held by students, their conception of school, and their moral development, and so I proposed the following questions in the primary schools and outside of schools to former students: What is the capital of Prussia or Bavaria? How many children did Jacob have? Tell the story of Joseph! In the schools they sometimes delivered themselves of tirades learned by rote from books; those who had finished the course never answered the questions. If not learned by heart, I hardly ever could get an answer. In mathematics I discovered no general rule: they sometimes answered well, and sometimes very poorly.

Then I asked them to write a composition on what they had been doing on last Sunday. All the girls and boys, without a single exception, replied the same, that on Sunday they had used every possible chance of praying, but that they had not played. This is a sample of the moral influence of the school.

To my question, which I put to grown men and women, why they did not study after leaving school, or why they did not read this or that book, they invariably replied that they had all attended the ceremony of confirmation, that they had passed the quarantine of the school, and that they had received a diploma for a certain degree of education, - for the rudiments.

In addition to that stupefying influence of school, for which the Germans gave such an appropriate name, "verdummen" [to stupefy (German)], which specifically consists in a continuous contortion of the mental faculties, there is another, a more harmful influence, which consists in the fact that during the long study hours, when the child is dulled by his school life, he is for a long period of time, so valuable at his age, torn away from all those necessary conditions of development which Nature has set for him.

One frequently hears or reads the statement that the home conditions, the rudeness of the parents, the field labor, the village games, and so forth, are the chief hindrances to school education. It may be that they really interfere with that school education, as pedagogues understand it; but it is time to convince ourselves that these conditions are the chief foundation of all education, and that they are far from being inimical and hindrances to the school, but that they are its prime and chief benefactors of it. A child could never learn to distinguish the lines which form the distinctive letters, nor numbers, nor could he acquire the ability to express his thoughts, if it were not for these home conditions.

It seems strange that this coarse domestic life should have been able to teach the child such difficult things and should all of a sudden become unfit to instruct him in such easy things as reading, writing, and so forth, and should even become injurious for such an instruction? The best proof of this is found in the comparison of a peasant boy who has never studied with a rich boy who has been for five years under the care of a tutor: the superiority of mind and knowledge is always on the side of the first. More than that. The interest in knowing anything whatsoever and the questions which it is the task of the school to answer are created only by these home conditions. Every study ought to be only an answer to the question put by life. Whereas school not only does not call forth questions, but does not even answer those that are called forth by life. It constantly answers the same questions which had been put by humanity several centuries back, and not by the intellect of the child, and which he is not interested in. Such questions are: How was the world created? Who was the first man? What happened two thousand years ago? What kind of a country is Asia? What is the shape of the earth? How do you multiply hundreds by thousands? What will happen after death? and so forth.

But to the questions which life presents to him he receives no reply, the more so since, according to the police regulation of the school, he has no right to open his mouth even to ask to be allowed to go out, which he must do by signs in order not to break the silence and not to disturb the teacher.

The school is arranged in such a manner because the aim of the government school, established from above, is, for the main part, not to educate the people, but to educate them according to our method, - above all, that there should be schools, and plenty of them! Are there no teachers? Make them! Still, there are not enough teachers. - Then let one teacher teach five hundred students: *mecaniser l'instruction* [to mechanize education (French)], Lancasterian method, student teachers [teaching of younger students by the senior (Eng.)]. For this reason the schools which are established from above and by force are not a shepherd for the flock, but a flock for the shepherd.

School is established, not in order that it should be convenient for the children to study, but that it should be comfortable for teachers to teach. The children's conversation, motion, and joyfulness, which are their necessary conditions of study, are not convenient for the teacher, and so in the schools, which are built on the plan of prisons, questions, conversation, and motion are prohibited.

Instead of convincing themselves that, in order to act successfully on a certain object, it is necessary to study it (in education this object is the free child), they want to teach just as they are able to, just as first comes to their minds, and in case of failure they want to change not the manner of their teaching, but the nature of the child itself. From this conception have sprung and even now spring (Pestalozzi) such systems as would allow to *mecaniser l'instruction*, - that eternal tendency of pedagogy to arrange matters in such a way that, no matter who the teacher and who the student may be, the method should remain one and the same.

It is enough to look at one and the same child at home, in the street, or at school: now you see a vivacious, curious child, with a smile in his eyes and on his lips, seeking instruction in everything, as he would seek pleasure, clearly and frequently strongly expressing his thoughts in his own words;

now again you see a worn-out, crushed being, with an expression of fatigue, terror, and boredom, repeating with the lips only strange words in a strange language, - a being whose soul has, like a snail, retreated into its house. It is enough to look at these two conditions in order to decide which of the two is more advantageous for the child's development.

That strange psychological condition which I will call the scholastic condition of the soul, and which all of us, unfortunately, know too well, consists in that all the higher faculties, imagination, creativeness, inventiveness, give way to other, semi-animal faculties, which consist in pronouncing sounds independently from any concept, in counting numbers in succession, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, in perceiving words, without allowing imagination to substitute images for these sounds, in short, in developing a faculty for crushing all higher faculties, so that only those might be evolved which coincide with the scholastic condition of fear, and of straining memory and attention.

Every student is so long an anomaly [disparate (French) - incompatible] at school until he has not fallen into the rut of this semi-animal condition. As soon as the child has reached that state and has lost all his independence and originality, the moment there appear in him various symptoms of disease, - hypocrisy, aimless lying, dullness, and so forth, - he no longer is an anomaly: he has fallen into the rut, and the teacher begins to be satisfied with him. Then there happen those by no means accidental and frequently repeated phenomena, that the dullest boy becomes the best student, and the most intelligent the worst. It seems to me that this fact is sufficiently significant to make people think and try to explain it. It seems to me that one such fact serves as a palpable proof of the fallacy of the principle of compulsory education.

More than that. Besides this negative injury, which consists in removing the children from the unconscious education which they receive at home, at work, in the street, the schools are physically injurious, - for the body, which at this early age is inseparable from the soul. This injury is especially important on account of the monotony of the scholastic education, even if it were good. For the agriculturist it is impossible to substitute anything for

those conditions of labor, life in the field, conversation of elders, and so forth, which surround him; even so it is with the artisan and, in general, with the inhabitant of the city. Not by accident, but purposefully, has Nature surrounded the agriculturist with rustic conditions, and the city dweller with urban conditions. These conditions are most highly instructive, and only in them can each develop. And yet, school lays down as the first condition of education the alienation from these conditions.

More than that. School is not satisfied with tearing the child away from life for six hours a day, during the best years of the child, - it wants to tear three-year-old children away from the influence of their mothers. They have invented institutions (Kleinkindbewahranstalt, infant schools, salles d'asile) [care homes for small children, children's schools, shelters (German, English, French)], of which we shall have occasion to speak more in detail. All that is lacking now is the invention of a steam engine to take the place of the nursing mother.

All agree that schools are imperfect (I, on my side, am convinced that they are injurious). All admit that many, very many, such improvements must be made. All agree that these improvements must be based on a greater comfort for the students. All agree that these comforts may be found out only through studying the needs of the children of school age and, in general, of every class in particular.

Now, what has been done for the study of this difficult and complex subject? For the period of several centuries each school has been based on the pattern of another, itself founded on the pattern of one before it, and in each of these schools the peremptory condition is discipline, which forbids children to speak, ask questions, choose this or that subject of instruction, - in short, all measures are taken to deprive the teacher of all possibility of making deductions in regard to the students' needs.

The compulsory structure of the school excludes the possibility of all progress. And yet, when we consider how many centuries have passed in answering the children's questions which it did not occur to them to put, and how far the present generations have departed from that ancient form of

education, with which they are inoculated, it becomes incomprehensible to us how it is these schools still exist. School, so it would appear to us, ought to be an implement of education and, at the same time, an experiment on the young generation, constantly giving new results. Only when experiment will be at the foundation of school, only then when every school will be, so to speak, a pedagogical laboratory, will the school not fall behind the overall progress, and experiment will be able to lay firm foundations for the science of education.

But perhaps history will answer our fruitless question: On what the right to compel parents and students to be educated is based? The existing schools, it will tell us, have been worked out historically, and just so they must continue to evolve historically, and to change in conformity with the demands of society and of time; the farther we go, the better the schools become.

To this I will reply: in the first place, that exclusively philosophic arguments are just as one-sided and false as exclusively historical arguments.

The consciousness of humanity forms the chief element of history; consequently, if humanity becomes conscious of the inadequacy of its schools, this fact of consciousness becomes a chief historical fact, upon which ought to be based the structure of the schools. In the second place, the farther we proceed, the schools do not get better, but worse, - worse as regards that level of education to which society has attained.

School is one of those organic parts of the state which cannot be viewed and valued separately, because its worth consists only in a greater or lesser correspondence to the remaining parts of the state. School is good only when it has taken cognizance of the fundamental laws by which the people live. A beautiful school for a Russian village of the steppe, which satisfies all the wants of its students, will be a very poor school for a Parisian; and the best school of the seventeenth century will be an exceedingly bad school in our time; and, on the other hand, the very worst school of the Middle Ages was in its time better than the best in our time, because it better corresponded to its time, and at least stood on a level with the general education, if not in advance of it, while our school stands behind it.

If the problem of the school, admitting the most general definition, consists in transmitting everything which the people have worked out and have become cognizant of, and in answering those questions which life puts to man, then there is no doubt but that in the medieval school the traditions were more limited and the questions which presented themselves in life were easier of solution, and this problem of the school was more easily satisfied. It was much easier to transmit the traditions of Greece and Rome from insufficient and improperly worked out sources, the religious dogmas, the grammar, and that part of mathematics which was then known, than to impart all those traditions which we have lived through since, and which have removed so far the tradition of antiquity, and all that knowledge of the natural sciences, which are necessary in our day as answers to the every-day phenomena of life. At the same time the manner of imparting this has remained the same, and therefore the school has had to fall behind and get, not better, but worse.

In order to maintain the school in the form in which it has been, and not to fall behind the educational movement, it has been necessary to be more consistent: not only to make education compulsory, but also to keep this education from moving forward by any other path, - to prohibit machines, roads of communication, and the art of printing.

So far as we know from history, the Chinese alone have been logical in this respect. The attempts of the other nations to restrict the art of printing, and, in general, the restriction of the educational movement, have been only temporary and insufficiently consistent. Therefore, the Chinese of all the nations may, at the present time, pride themselves on a good school, one that completely corresponds to the general level of education.

If we are told that the schools are perfected historically, we shall only reply that the improvement of schools must be understood relatively, and what is relative is that schools, on the contrary, with every year and with every hour of compulsion, become worse and worse; that is, they more and more depart from the general level of education, because their progress is disproportionate to the progress of education since the days of the invention of printing.

In the third place, in reply to the historical argument that schools have existed

and therefore are good, I shall myself adduce a historical argument. Last year I was in Marseilles, where I visited all the schools for the working people of that city. The proportion of the students to the population is very great, and so the children, with few exceptions, attend school in the duration of three, four, and even six years. The school programs consist in learning by heart the catechism, Biblical and universal history, the four operations of arithmetic, French orthography, and bookkeeping. In what way bookkeeping could form the subject of instruction I was unable to comprehend, and not one teacher could explain it to me. The only explanation I was able to make to myself, when I examined the books kept by the students who had finished the course, was that they did not know even three rules of arithmetic, but that they had learned by heart to operate with figures and that, therefore, they had also to learn by rote *tenue des livres* [bookkeeping (French)] how to keep books. (It seems to me that there is no need of proving that the *tenue des livres*, *Buchhaltung* [bookkeeping (German)], as it is taught in Germany and England, is a science which demands about four hours of explanation for a student who knows the four rules of arithmetic.) Not one boy in these schools was able to solve, that is, to formulate the simplest problem of addition and subtraction. And yet, they operated with abstract numbers, multiplying thousands with ease and rapidity.

To questions from the history of France they answered well by rote, but when asked randomly, I received such answers as that Henry IV had been killed by Julius Cesar. The same was the case with geography and sacred history. The same with orthography and reading. More than one half of the girls cannot read any other books than those they have studied. Six years of school had not given them the faculty of writing a word without a mistake.

I know that the facts which I bring up seem so incredible that many will doubt them; but I could write whole books about the ignorance which I have witnessed in the schools of France, Switzerland, and Germany. Let any one who has this thing at heart study the schools, not from the reports of public examinations, but from extended visits and conversations with teachers and students in the schools and outside the schools.

In Marseilles I also visited a lay school, and another, a monastic school, for

grown persons. Out of 250,000 inhabitants, less than one thousand, of these only two hundred men, attend these schools. The education system is the same: mechanical reading, which is acquired in a year or in longer time, bookkeeping without the knowledge of arithmetic, religious instruction, and so forth. After the lay school, I saw the daily instruction offered in the churches; I saw the salles cfasile [shelters (French)], in which four-year-old children, at a given whistle, like soldiers, made evolutions around the benches, at a given command lifted and folded their hands, and with quivering and strange voices sang laudatory hymns to God and to their benefactors, and I convinced myself that the educational institutions of the city of Marseilles were exceedingly bad.

If, by some miracle, a person should see all these establishments, without having seen the people in the streets, in their shops, in the cafes, in their home surroundings, what opinion would he form of a nation which was educated in such a manner? He certainly would conclude that that nation was ignorant, crude, hypocritical, full of prejudices, and almost wild. But it is enough to enter into relations, and to chat with a common man in order to be convinced that the French nation is, on the contrary, about such as it regards itself to be: intelligent, clever, affable, free from prejudices, and really civilized. Look at a city workman of about thirty years of age: he will write a letter, not with such mistakes as are made at school, often without mistakes; he has an idea of politics, consequently of modern history and geography; he knows more or less history from novels; he has some knowledge of the natural sciences. He frequently draws and applies mathematical formula to his trade. Where did he acquire all that?

I involuntarily found an answer to it in Marseilles, when, after the schools, I began to stroll down the streets, to frequent the dram-shops, cafes chantants, museums, workshops, quays, and book-stalls. The very boy who told me that Henry IV had been killed by Julius Cesar knew very well the history of the "Three Musketeers" and of "Monte Cristo." I found twenty-eight illustrated editions of these in Marseilles, costing from five to ten centimes. To a population of 250,000 they sell 30,000 of them, - consequently, if we suppose that 10 people read or listen to one copy, we find that all have read them. In addition there are the museum, the public libraries, the theaters. Then the

cafes, two large cafes chantants, where each may enter for fifty centimes' worth of food or drink, and where there are daily as many as 25,000 people, not counting the smaller cafes, which hold as many more: in each of these cafes they give little comedies and scenes, and recite poems. Taking the lowest calculation, we get one-fifth of the population, who get their daily oral education just as the Greeks and Romans were educated in their amphitheaters.

Whether this education is good or bad is another matter; but here it is, this unconscious education which is so much more powerful than the one by compulsion; here is the unconscious school which has undermined the compulsory school and has made its contents to dwindle down almost to nothing. There is left only the despotic form with hardly any contents. I say with hardly any contents, because I exclude the mere mechanical ability of putting letters together and writing down words, - the only knowledge which is acquired after five or six years' study. Here it must be remarked that even the mere mechanical art of reading and writing is frequently acquired outside of school in a much shorter period, and that frequently the students do not acquire from school even this ability, or lose it, finding no application in life, and that there where the law of compulsory school attendance exists there is no need of teaching the second generation to read, write, and figure, because the parents, we should think, would be able to do that at home, and that, too, much easier than at school.

What I saw in Marseilles takes place in all the other countries: everywhere the greater part of one's education is acquired, not at school, but in life. There where life is instructive, as in London, Paris, and, in general, in all large cities, the masses are educated; there where life is not instructive, as in the country, the people are uneducated, in spite of the fact that the schools are the same in both. The knowledge acquired in cities seems to remain; the knowledge acquired in the country is lost. The direction and spirit of the popular education, both in the cities and in the villages, are absolutely independent from and generally contrary to the spirit which it is intended to instil into the schools. The education goes on quite independently of the schools.

The historical argument against the historical argument is found in considering the history of education, where we do not find that the schools have progressed in proportion to the people's development, but that, on the contrary, they have fallen and have become an empty formality in proportion with the people's advancement; that the more a nation has progressed in general education, the more has education passed away from school to life, making the contents of the school meaningless.

Leaving aside all the other means of education, the development of commercial relations, the improved intercommunication, the greater measure of personal liberty, and the participation of the individual in affairs of state, - leaving aside meetings, museums, public lectures, and so forth, it suffices to look at the mere art of printing and its evolution, in order to understand the difference in the condition of the old school and the new. The unconscious education of life and the conscious scholastic education have always gone side by side, complementing each other; but in the absence of the art of printing what insignificant amount of education could life afford in comparison with the school! Science then belonged to a few elect, who were in possession of the means of education.

See, now, what share has fallen to the education afforded by life, when there is not a man who has not a book; when books are sold at an insignificant price; when public libraries are open to all; when a boy, as he comes from school, carries with him, not only his note-books, but also some cheap illustrated novel carefully concealed; when in our country two primers are sold for three kopeks, and any peasant of the steppe will buy a primer and will ask a transient soldier to show and teach him all the wisdom, which the latter had in former years learned in the course of many years from a sexton; when a gymnasiast abandons the gymnasium and from books alone prepares himself for the entrance examination at the university; when young people leave the university and, instead of studying the professors' notes, work directly on the sources; when, sincerely speaking, every serious education is acquired only from life, and not in school.

The last and, in my opinion, the most important argument consists in this: granting even that the Germans have a right to defend the school historically,

on the ground of its existence for the period of two hundred years, what reason have we to defend the public school which we do not yet possess? What historical right have we to say that our schools must be such as the other European schools are? We have not yet a history of public education. But if we examine closely the universal history of popular education, we shall not only become convinced that we can in no way establish seminaries for teachers according to the German pattern, work over the German sound method, the English infant schools, the French lyceums and special schools, and thus catch up with Europe, but also that we Russians are living under exceptionally fortunate conditions as regards the popular education; that our school must not issue, as it had in medieval Europe, from the conditions of civil life; must not serve certain governmental or religious ends; must not be evolved in the darkness of controlling public opinion and of an absence of the highest degree of vital education; must not with new pain and labor pass through and get out of that vicious circle, through which the European schools passed so long, and which consists in the assumption that the school was to move the unconscious education, and the unconscious education was to move the school. The European nations have vanquished this difficulty, but of necessity have lost much in the struggle.

Let us be thankful for the labor which we are called to make use of, and let us not forget that we are called to accomplish a new labor in this field. On the basis of what humanity has already experienced and in consideration of the fact that our activity has not yet begun, we are able to bring to bear a greater consciousness upon our labor, and, therefore, we are obliged to do so.

In order to borrow the methods of the European schools, we are obliged to distinguish that which in them is based on the eternal laws of reason from that which owes its origin to historical conditions. There is no general sensible law, no criterion, which justifies the violence which the school exercises against the people; therefore, every imitation of the European school will be not a step in advance, but a retrogression as regards our people, it will be a treason to its calling.

It is intelligible why in France there has been evolved a school of discipline with the predominance of the exact sciences, - mathematics, geometry, and

drawing; why in Germany there has been evolved a graduated educational school with the predominance of singing and analysis; it is intelligible why in England there have developed such a mass of societies founding philanthropic schools for the proletariat, with their strictly moral and, at the same time, practical tendencies; but what school is to be evolved in Russia is not known to us and never will be known, if we do not permit it to be worked out freely and in proper season, that is, in conformity with that historical epoch in which it is to develop, in conformity with its own history and still more with universal history. If we become convinced that popular education is advancing on the wrong path in Europe, then, by doing nothing for our popular education, we shall be doing more than if we should force upon it all that which seems good to us.

So the little educated people want to be better educated, and the educated class wants to educate the masses, but the masses submit to education only under constraint.

We have looked in philosophy, experience, and history for those principles which would give the educating class such a right, but we have found none; on the contrary, we have convinced ourselves that human thought is constantly striving after freeing the people from constraint in matters of education.

In looking for a criterion of pedagogy, that is, for a knowledge of what ought to be instructed and how to do it, we found nothing but the most contradictory opinions and institutions, and we have come to the conclusion that the farther humanity advanced, the less possible did such a criterion become. Looking for this criterion in the history of education, we have come to the conclusion that for us Russians the historically evolved schools cannot serve as patterns, and that, moreover, these schools, with every step in advance, fall more and more behind the common level of education, and that, therefore, their compulsory character becomes more and more illegal, and that, finally, education itself in Europe has, like oozing water, chosen another path for itself, - it has obviated the schools and has poured forth in the vital tools of education.

What are we Russians to do at the present moment? Shall we all come to some agreement and take as our basis the English, French, German, or North American view of education and any one of their methods? Or, shall we, by closely examining philosophy and psychology, discover what in general is necessary for the development of a human soul and for making out of the younger generation the best men possible according to our conception? Or, shall we make use of the experience of history, not in the sense of imitating those forms which history has evolved, but in the sense of comprehending those laws which humanity has worked out through suffering, - shall we say frankly and honestly to ourselves that we do not know and cannot know what the future generations may need, but that we feel ourselves obliged to study these wants and that we wish to do so? that we do not wish to accuse the people of ignorance for not accepting our education, but that we shall accuse ourselves of ignorance and haughtiness if we persist in educating the people according to our ideas? Let us cease looking upon the people's resistance to our education as upon a hostile element of pedagogy, but, on the contrary, let us see in it an expression of the people's will which alone ought to guide our activities. Let us finally profess that law which so plainly tells us, both from the history of pedagogy and from the whole history of education, that for the educating class to know what is good and what bad, the classes which receive the education must have the full power to express their dissatisfaction, or, at least, to swerve from the education which instinctively does not satisfy them, - that the criterion of pedagogy is only liberty.

We have chosen this latter path in our pedagogical activity.

At the basis of our activity lies the conviction that we not only do not know, but we cannot know, wherein the education of the people is to consist; that not only does there not exist a science of education, - pedagogy, - but that the first foundation of it has not yet been laid; that the definition of pedagogy and of its aims in a philosophical sense is impossible, useless, and injurious.

We do not know what education is to be like, and we do not acknowledge the whole philosophy of pedagogy because we do not acknowledge the possibility of a man's knowing what it is he ought to know. Education and culture present themselves to us as historical facts of one set of people acting

upon another; therefore, the problem of the science of education, in our opinion, is only the discovery of the laws of this action of one set of people upon another. We not only do not acknowledge in our generation the knowledge, nor even the right of a knowledge of what is necessary for the perfecting of man, but are also convinced that if humanity were possessed of that knowledge, it would not be in its power to transmit, or not to transmit such knowledge. We are convinced that the cognition of good and evil, independently of man's will, lies in humanity at large and is developed unconsciously, together with history, and that it is impossible to inculcate upon the younger generation our cognition, just as it is impossible to deprive it of this our cognition and of that degree of a higher cognition to which the next step of history will take it. Our putative knowledge of the laws of good and evil, and our activity in regard to the younger generation on the basis of these laws, are for the greater part a counteraction to the development of a new cognition, which is not yet worked out by our generation, but which is being worked out in the younger generation, - it is an impediment, and not an aid to education.

We are convinced that education is history, and therefore has no final end. Education, in its widest sense, including the bringing up, is, in our opinion, that activity of man, which has for its base the need of equality, and the invariable law of educational progress.

A mother teaches her child to speak only that they may understand each other; the mother instinctively tries to come down to the child's view of things, to his language, but the law of educational progress does not permit her to descend down to him, but compels him to rise to her knowledge. The same relation exists between the author and the reader, the same between the school and the students, the same between the state and society, - the people. The activity of him who gives the education has one and the same purpose. The problem of the science of education is only the study of the conditions under which a coincidence of these two tendencies for one common end takes place, and the indication of those conditions which retard this coincidence.

Thus the science of education, on the one hand, becomes easier to us in that it no longer puts the questions: what is the final aim of education, and for what

must we prepare the younger generation? and so forth; on the other, it is immeasurably more difficult. We are compelled to study all the conditions which have aided in the coincidence of the tendencies of him who educates, and of him who is being educated; we must define what that freedom is, the absence of which impedes the coincidence of both the tendencies, and which alone serves as our criterion of the whole science of education; we must move step by step, away from an endless number of facts, to the solution of the questions of the science of education.

We know that our arguments will not convince many. We know that our fundamental convictions that the only method of education is experiment, and its only criterion freedom, will sound to some like trite commonplace, to some like an indistinct abstraction, to others again like a visionary dream. We should not have dared to violate the quiet of the theoretical pedagogues and to express these convictions, which are contrary to all experience, if we had to confine ourselves to the reflections of this article; but we feel our ability to prove, step after step, and fact after fact, the applicability and legitimacy of our such wild convictions, and to this end alone do we devote this publication.